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Social Questions
BULLETIN

of the Methodist Federation for Social Service (unofficial), an organization which rejects the method of the struggle for profit as the economic base for society; which seeks to replace it with social-economic planning in order to develop a society without class distinctions and privileges.

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When People Starve in Cleveland

"Relief Slash Hits 11,000! Effective at once . . . ," announced *The Cleveland Plain Dealer,* November 25, 1939.

"All Employable Adult Single Persons on relief are to be dropped. This involves about 8000.

"All Cases consisting of two or more adults, at least one of whom is employable (for example, childless couples), also are to be dropped. Such cases include about 3000 persons.

"All Food Orders to remaining relief cases (the unemployables and those with children in the family) are to be cut one-third. That means a family of four which normally has an allowance of 80c a day will now get 54c a day, when and if it gets relief. All Relief Orders still given will be issued only in the most urgent and acute need to sick clients or those with children, and then only after a relief supervisor approves the request."

It should be stated that to the above 54c a day surplus commodities were added which had an average value of 12½c per day, making the food total for a family of four 66½c per day. However, the Bureau of Home Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture states that to maintain an adequate diet at present prices a family of four needs 97c a day.

EFFECTS OF RELIEF CRISIS

The following excerpts, taken from the fact-finding report "The Human Side of a Relief Crisis," published December 22, 1939, by the Cleveland Chapter of the American Association of Social Workers, show what this relief cut meant to human lives in Cleveland.

A DOCTOR SPEAKS

"The relief situation in Cleveland since November 15th has become very acute. In my duties as a city physician, I am called upon to give care to the indigent sick. Lately I have been called in quite frequently to see people who are not really ill but whose complaint is referrable to a lack of food. I can recall quite vividly a number of such cases.

"Just the other day I went in to see a young woman of twenty-two who complained of general weakness. Upon examination, I was unable to find any organic basis for complaints and in questioning her I obtained the information that for the past six days she had been living almost entirely upon potatoes and potato peelings. This is not an isolated case. I could multiply this one case many times over.

"Today I visited a family of seven . . . who receive seventy-five cents per day to feed all these individuals. Even under the most expert management, a housewife cannot possibly feed herself and her children on such an allowance. The children, especially, become weak, emaciated and underweight, and as a result frequently contract colds and other diseases which they would not become subject to had they been eating an adequate diet."

TIES FOR FUEL

"A young couple, married last March. The woman was three months' pregnant at the time of the relief crisis. The man had been a steady worker although he had been unemployed for a time and finally had gotten on W.P.A. Public relief had been given to the extent of $1.27 every two weeks. When relief was cut off, the man pawned his overcoat so that his wife could have food. The man himself was sick with a bad case of flu when he went to the public relief agency. He spent hours waiting only to be told no more food orders were available. They needed coal as well. The man was desperate. He got as many old ties as he could from friends to burn for heat. His wife was very sick by this time. The furniture company came and threatened to take the furniture, which they finally did. The woman was on the verge of pneumonia when they appealed to the private agency."

ONIONS, APPLES, TEA!

"Said a fourteen-year-old girl, 'I found my aunt and the little children crying. My aunt told me that it was because they were hungry. They hadn't had any food that day and nothing but cornmeal the day before. My little cousin had found some onions and was eating those with some mustard. The little baby was crying because she hadn't had any milk all day. . . . Neither my aunt nor the neighbors had gotten any (food) orders'."

"A middle-aged couple. Because of a wooden leg, the man was unable to secure employment after having been laid off five years ago. . . . For the past two weeks, their diet has consisted almost solely of apples and water. They displayed the entire contents of their larder—two apples, one quarter of a melon, and about a cup of beans. 'If we could just once get enough to eat, I think we could manage better,' commented the wife. 'Yes,' added her husband, 'after you eat apples for a while, it's worse than if you had not eaten at all. They upset your stomach so'."

"One worker reported a client who had onion sandwiches for Thanksgiving dinner."

"The teachers at one school were quite concerned about nineteen children who were showing the effects of the relief crisis. The youngsters seemed weak, were listless

and had a much shorter attention span than usual. Others were described as undernourished with dark circles under their eyes. One child who had had very little food in the past several weeks vomited the past two mornings at school having had only tea for breakfast."

DIABETIC

"In a family of man and wife, both of them over 55, the woman has diabetes and has had one leg amputated at the thigh because of diabetic gangrene. The man had been in — Hospital for some time receiving treatment for gastric ulcers. He had been in a very serious condition. He was released from the hospital during the crisis and was at his home when the food order was discontinued. His wife 'could not even give him a cup of milk'."

HUNGRY STUDENT

"A man of 65 was reported by one of the settlements. His wife had broken her hip and was cared for in —— Hospital for four months and was then sent to —— Infirmary . . . (He was) laid off W.P.A. because he was not a citizen. (This was) a crushing blow to this man, old and illiterate. He was trying hard to get his citizenship papers. On December 5th he had returned to the citizenship class in the settlement, still hoping to get the papers which would make him eligible for work, although he had had nothing to eat that day."

SUMMARY

"The Fact-Finding Report," in addition to the above, cited case after case showing how the relief crisis caused a severe clothing need; evictions followed by removal to poorer dwellings; turning off of gas and electricity; the gathering of food from waste in the market and begging; theft of coal. Flu, colds, pleurisy, pneumonia and other lung conditions flourished. Cardiac conditions were aggravated by the insecurity. There was loss of morale and resentment against society followed by threats against others and threats of suicide.

"We affirm our belief," stated the Report, "that this kind of crisis is preventable and that it must not be allowed to happen again."

THE RESPONSIBILITY

Since the beginning of the depression, a vast system of new law has developed to care for those in economic distress. Above the old poor laws of states, counties, cities and towns a new structure, supported from federal funds, has been built. This results in a complicated set of responsibilities under various provisions of these laws old and new.

The set-up, as far as the federal government is concerned, is as follows: (1) The provision of work for the "employables" through W.P.A. and P.W.A. The federal government originally undertook to care for *all* the "employables," leaving to the states and to local communities only the care of the unemployables. It has never, however, *appropriated enough* to do this and therefore the states and local communities have had to carry a large load of "employables." (2) The Social Security Act. This act is a complicated law, setting up various devices: (a) Old age insurance which provides benefits (although inadequate) to workers of certain kinds; (b) Unemployment insurance in cooperation with the states. All the states together with the District of Columbia, Alaska and Hawaii now have such laws. However, in most cases they fail to provide adequate benefits; (c) Direct grants-in-aid to the states which enable states to provide funds, matched by federal funds, for aid to the aged, to dependent children and to the blind. (3) The federal government has also provided assistance to farmers, and to youth through the C.C.C. and N.Y.A.

STATE AND LOCAL OBLIGATIONS

In spite of these new and elaborate federal provisions a great deal of responsibility still rests with states and local communities. Many persons fall between these provisions of the federal laws, and the burden is so heavy on the local taxpayer that many authorities believe the federal government ought also to appropriate funds to the states for general assistance in order to help them carry the burden. At present, however, states and local communities are carrying responsibility for all the unemployables, all the so-called "paupers" who because of illness or some other difficulty can not care for themselves, and many of the employables who can not get on W.P.A. or P.W.A.—estimated in December to be approximately one million.

In Ohio the counties carry the responsibility for those in need who have no legal residence, for the indigent sick in hospitals, and for the so-called "permanent paupers." The cities on the other hand have assumed the responsibility for the unemployables who have a legal residence within their boundaries.

Such recent public provisions for persons in need clearly reveal that the trend in assistance is toward public, rather than private support. In fact, expenditures from public funds have increased until they now supply more than 99 per cent. of all the aid to families in homes. Although relief has become largely public, our government—federal, state and local—has not yet *adequately* accepted the responsibility.

IMMEDIATE CAUSES

Among the factors which helped to produce the Cleveland breakdown are the following: (1) The general reduction in W.P.A. and the lay-off of aliens and of those who had been on for eighteen months threw large numbers back on the city for support. (2) ". . . State relief legislation under which Ohio is now operating provides for reimbursement (not matching) of local relief expenditures by the state up to 50 per cent. of these expenditures. Appropriations made on the basis of estimated needs were, however, cut below the amount recommended by the state administration's own experts. The result is that Cleveland has been reimbursed to date for only 38 per cent. of its total expenditures for direct relief." (*The Compass,* January, 1940.) The governor did not call a special session of the General Assembly to consider the appropriation of additional funds, although "operation of state government ended with a balance of $3,369,268 in the state treasury." (*The Cleveland Press,* January 25, 1940.) (3) Some persons in need fell between the various categories of assistance as at present inadequately set up. (4) A factor in the picture was the failure at the November election of the Cuyahoga County Welfare Levy, which required a vote of 65 per cent. Though this was a city relief breakdown, the failure of county resources aggravated the Cleveland situation. (5) The way out (which was finally

employed)—the sale of tax delinquency bonds—was a debatable procedure. Lawyers had said the limit had already been reached for the sale of such bonds. (6) The reasons why the City did not get around to doing anything about relief earlier may have been the pending city election. (7) People were hardened about relief. "They" will pull a rabbit out of a hat! Nobody pulled out a rabbit this time.

CLEVELAND CHURCHES IN THE CRISIS

Religion, so far as we can learn, went on about as usual. The Thanksgiving season and the approaching Christmas holidays made Church-going persons more aware of need. Food baskets and financial aid were increased. The churches of Cleveland were represented on the "Citizens' Emergency Relief Committee" by Rev. Gordon E. Bigelow, Cleveland Church Federation; Rev. Albert J. Murphy, Catholic Charities Corporation; and Rabbi Armond E. Cohen, The Jewish Center. This Committee went to Columbus and urged the governor to call a special session of the General Assembly to take action in the Ohio Relief situation. Reports of this meeting were made to the ministers of the city. O. M. Walton, executive secretary of the Cleveland Church Federation, pressed the governor to take action and thus wired the Director of Public Welfare in Cleveland, "Churches ready to fit in with the Welfare Department whenever called upon."

DID THE CHURCHES FAIL?

Some churches in Ohio served food to the hungry, but this of course reached but a comparative few, for a limited time, and had necessarily to be carried out in a hit-or-miss way.

The Church people could have used their imagination and intelligence in working, through their elected representatives in local, state and federal bodies, for an adequate immediate and permanent plan of assistance to persons in need.

FEEDING 300,000

When a relief cut was under consideration in Chicago, Paul H. Douglas, a Church man and a member of the City Council, knowing that thousands in his city were starving, and realizing that such need could not be met except through appropriation of public funds, packed a basket of food and placed it on his desk in the Council chamber. Then he arose and spoke of "the slow starvation of 300,000 people" in the city. As he spoke he arranged on his desk the contents of his basket, the daily food which the "relief budget" provided. This amount was already 35 per cent. below the minimum standard of the United Charities of Chicago, for a family of four. It consisted of: ½ lb. prunes, ½ lb. peas, ⅓ lb. rice, ¼ lb. butter, ¼ lb. oleo, ¼ lb. cheese, ¼ lb. sugar, 1 lb. hamburger, 2½ lbs. potatoes, 1½ qts. milk, 1 lb. apples, ¼ doz. eggs, 1 can tomatoes, ¼ lb. coffee, 1½ loaves of bread, ½ pkg. oatmeal, 1 small bar of soap, salt and pepper.

To indicate successive cuts in the budget for this family Alderman Douglas removed the items of food cut off. He next took away what would be omitted if the proposed relief cut should be made. On his desk remained for this family of four for a day: ½ lb. peas, ½ lb. prunes, ⅓ lb. rice, ¼ lb. oleo, ¼ lb. sugar, 1 qt. milk, 1 loaf of bread, salt and pepper.

"The aldermen and the galleries," states *The Chicago Daily News* (August 9, 1939), "gazed in awed silence. The mayor's face grew gray. . . . Then Alderman Douglas startled the meeting by saying that the two-thirds majority necessary to pass relief legislation could be obtained only if the city would promise to raise part of the extra funds. . . ."

Later the City Council of Chicago voted an additional $1,000,000 for relief.

That was one food basket that was taken to the proper place, the elected public council of the people, and demonstrated how goodwill, intelligence, imagination and courage, when properly applied could so multiply one small basket as to feed 300,000!

WHY NO MASS DEMONSTRATIONS?

The Church people in Cleveland could have appeared in a mass demonstration before the City Council, and before the Governor, and could have sent a delegation to Congress and the President, with a demand for an immediate adequate relief appropriation, and for the setting up of an adequate permanent plan of assistance. As it was "with the absence of mass demonstrations some people were inclined to believe that 'there is no real suffering—it just shows they don't need relief anyway'."

CRUCIAL QUESTIONS

1. What hazards to a democratic way of life lie in hunger and insecurity?
2. What can religion through its belief in the worth of the individual and in the value of human brotherhood contribute to clarify our responsibility and to prevent such crises?
3. What role can professional social workers play in the prevention of such critical situations? How can they be used by churches who wish to learn the real facts involved?
4. How can church people in rural areas come to a better understanding of the situation of those in distress in urban communities? How can they avoid being used by those who for their own selfish ends wish to defeat adequate appropriation for relief?
5. What should be the attitude of church people toward paying the taxes necessary for an adequate relief program?
6. What should be the attitude of the churches toward taxpayers' groups or other groups whose chief purpose is to keep down taxes regardless of social need and community responsibility?
7. How can the Churches assist in bringing pressure to bear upon Congress and the President to restore the cuts in the W.P.A., the P.W.A. and the C.C.C. appropriations for the next fiscal year?
8. What is the matter with our American economic system that produces such a crisis as that experienced in Cleveland?
9. In a country like ours where we could have plenty for all yet where we have at present inadequate incomes for most of our population, how can the churches assist in bringing about a better use of our resources and a better distribution of our common wealth?

We are indebted to a Cleveland M. F. S. S. member for the material in this article.

News from the Field

During November, December and January Charles Webber met with our Federation members and the members of the other units of the United Christian Council for Democracy in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Columbus, Dayton, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, Toledo, Buffalo and Syracuse.

While in Cleveland promoting the National Emergency Conference of the M.F.S.S. and the U.C.C.D. he addressed numerous church groups; the Methodist Ministers' Meeting; both A.F. of L. and C.I.O. unions; and the Mass Meeting of the Cleveland Religion and Labor Center, where he spoke on "The Religious Significance of the Labor Movement."

EMBARGO ON JAPAN

The Northern Minnesota Conference of the Methodist Church at its recent session commended the government for giving notice of the abrogation of its trade treaty with Japan and urged a policy which will prevent the sale of all primary and secondary war materials to Japan and "all other aggressor nations."

THE CLEVELAND CONFERENCE

Three hundred and seventy men and women, of whom 105 were Methodists, registered at the United Christian Council for Democracy Conference.

The report of the Commission on the Christian Religion and Democratic Rights which was adopted by the Conference as a whole, declared (in part):

"We believe that the National Labor Relations Act has effectively and properly safeguarded the rights and privileges of the labor movement in the United States, that it has not infringed upon legitimate rights of employers, that it has promoted justice and stability, and thus has strengthened the foundations of American democracy. We commend the personnel of the Board and oppose any fundamental change in the Act. We recommend that Congress strengthen the Act by requiring that both employers and representatives of employees sign any negotiated agreement resulting from collective bargaining.

"We go on record in favor of the Anti-Lynching Bill now before Congress and in urging the Church to set the example in welcoming people of other races into its membership.

"We are opposed to the Anti-Alien bills . . . the Hobbs Bill, the Smith Bill, the Dempsey Bill and the Reynolds Bill.

"We believe that the Dies Committee has violated democratic procedure and we are also opposed to the use of some of these undemocratic methods by the Smith Committee (now investigating the National Labor Relations Board).

"We urge a thorough investigation by the Department of Justice on a national scale of the Christian Front movement and the connection of Father Coughlin with it.

"We strongly urge the restoration of cuts made in WPA appropriations, Farm Security, NYA, CCC, and Public Works.

"We heartily endorse the consumers' cooperative movement.

"We believe that the Christian religion compels us to reject the method of the struggle for profits as the economic base of society, and to substitute the method of social-economic planning under democratic control, with social ownership of all things necessary to its successful operation, as the method by which the Christian principle of service and development of personality can be progressively realized. This change is to be sought by education, democratic discussion and social legislation, not by violence."

In dealing with the issues of war and peace the Conference affirmed:

"That war is contrary to the Christian gospel and way of life.

"That . . . we are agreed the United States can best serve the world by keeping out of this war and by using its influence and resources to promote a just peace for all peoples as speedily as possible.

"That we reaffirm our loyalty to the principle of freedom of conscience; demanding from the authorities of state and Church exemption from war duties for the conscientious objector and full guarantee of his rights as a citizen; also the full respect from pacifists and war resisters for the integrity, honor, and the religious and civil rights of Christians who fulfill their duties as the state may require in war time.

"Finally, that we oppose at all times the exaltation of the military over the civil authority, the suspension of the Bill of Rights in emergencies; that we oppose imperialistic ambitions, as contrary to the ideals of the United States of America."

Resolutions were adopted:

1. Calling upon the United States to move now to stop the war by calling on all belligerents to state terms upon which they will negotiate.
2. Supporting the neutrality law and opposing all attempts to break down restrictions of the Act.
3. Favoring the setting up of Keep-America-Out-of-War committees in churches, with state and regional conferences urged to take appropriate action looking toward that end.

FEDERATION FINANCES

In order for the Federation to pay salaries, to publish the Social Questions Bulletin and to pay off our indebtedness, we need to raise $5000. We therefore count on you to do one or more of the following:

1. Renew your membership.
2. Secure a new membership.
3. Make a contribution over and above your membership.

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